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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 002370

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SUBJECT: RRT ERBIL: KRG MINISTER,S HARSH CRITICISM OF U.S.
STATE DEPARTMENT, EMBASSY

BAGHDAD 00002370 001.2 OF 002

Classified By: RRT Erbil Team Leader Andrew Snow for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (U) This is an RRT Erbil cable.

¶2. (C) Summary: Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) Minister Responsible for Foreign Relations Falah Mustafa announced publicly that Embassy Baghdad fails to inform Washington about Kurdistan Regional issues. He repeated it again in a meeting with RRT Leader Andrew Snow as part of a passionate plea for greater U.S. understanding of KRG positions. He questioned why the U.S. had a Regional Reconstruction Team (RRT) in Erbil instead of a consulate, noted Iranian influence on the GOI, and complained about the disparity between U.S. assistance to the KRG versus the rest of Iraq. Falah,s close relationship with Kurdish President Masoud Barzani indicates that he was conveying the official KRG view and staking out a hard-line position as a preemptive strike against anticipated U.S. pressure to concede on KRG-GOI contentious issues. End Summary.

Public and Private Criticism of Embassy Baghdad, U.S.
Department of State:

¶3. (SBU) In an August 25 interview with a local newspaper, Falah Mustafa stated that the KRG does not believe the U.S. Embassy is aware of the Kurdistan Region in a good way; in particular, the Embassy does not adequately inform Washington about Kurdistan Regional issues.

¶4. (C) Subsequently, in an August 27 meeting with RRT Team Leader Andrew Snow, the normally affable Falah went into a long tirade against U.S. policy toward the Kurds, directing his harshest rebuke toward the Embassy and the State Department. When RRT Leader pointed that the U.S. seeks to find ways to facilitate solutions to the contentious problems between Erbil and Baghdad, he launched into the following points:

--We can't accept U.S. pressure. You made us more vulnerable than two years ago. You made Iran more powerful than two years ago. At that time, KRG Prime Minister Nechirvan Barzani told the U.S. to close Iraq,s borders. Now Iran is harvesting what it sowed. Iranians worked hard in the recent KRG elections against President Masoud Barzani. If we don,t work closely with Turkey and the U.S., Iran will dominate the region. Iran is very influential in the GOI.

--If Article 140 is not implemented, there will be no stability. From President Barzani on down, Kurds are not ready to make compromises on Article 140. There is now a plan in the works by the U.S. and U.K. to find an alternative to Article 140 but it needs to be settled as prescribed by the constitution. Article 140 was part of the agreed deal with (former US Ambassadors) Bremer and Khalilzad.

--What have the Kurds gained by being part of Iraq? Anfal and other persecutions. Baghdad needs to make concessions, not the Kurds. We need their commitment that there will be no repetition of these things. Of course the Kurds want to solve these issues by dialogue and PM Nechirvan Barzani referred to KRG openness to compromise at recent meetings with U.S. officials.

--The Embassy and State Department are biased in their views in favor of the Arabs. The U.S. military better understands the Kurdish position than the State Department (Note: RRT Team Leader stated that there is only one U.S. policy and it is set by the White House. End Note). There are many Arabists both in the State Department and the Embassy and they are listening to Shahristani, (Iraq's Minister of Oil) point of view. The U.S. has forgotten that KRG President Masoud Barzani and Iraq's President Jalal Talabani helped to keep Iraq united in 2003, and that the Peshmerga helped separate Iraq united in 2003, and that the Peshmerga helped separate Shia and Sunni who were killing each other. In the KRG we did not make June 30 a holiday (Note: Date designated in the U.S.-Iraq Security Treaty for U.S. forces to leave Iraqi cities, towns and villages; Iraqi PM Maliki declared it an official Iraqi holiday, Sovereignty Day. End note). We are America's friends. We will never forget what the U.S. did in 1991 and in overthrowing Saddam. We refer to the &liberation⁸ not the &invasion.⁸ The U.S. should look at the KR as its success story. It hurts us. Why is the office in Erbil called a Regional Reconstruction Team when other countries have consulates? KRG appreciates visits from senior USG officials and would like to get more.

Only Erbil can speak for KRG

¶4. (C) When the RRT Team Leader noted the current frequency of U.S. official visits to Erbil and pointed out that the Embassy also talks to Kurdish officials in Baghdad, he

BAGHDAD 00002370 002.2 OF 002

retorted that only Erbil can speak for the KRG. He said that Kurdish officials in Baghdad are also GOI officials so it's not appropriate for them to represent KRG. (Note: This may in part be the KDP flexing its muscles vis-a-vis PUK and wanting the U.S. to talk directly to Barzani and his circle in Erbil. Embassy officers have repeatedly urged senior KDP officials to strengthen their representation in Baghdad, to no avail. End Note)

Disparity in U.S. Assistance:

5.(C) Falah complained about how little assistance money flows to the Kurdistan Region: "The U.S. has spent huge sums in the rest of Iraq but very little in the Kurdistan Region; only 3 percent of total U.S. assistance to Iraq, if military assistance is included. The U.S. spends a lot on the Iraqi forces but nothing of any consequence on the Peshmerga." RRT Leader responded that the \$1.1 billion in USG assistance spent in the KR since 2003 must be one of the highest levels of per capita assistance in the world spent on a region that was peaceful.

Comment:

¶6. (C) The message conveyed strongly suggests that Falah was speaking under instructions. His long and insistent tirade contrasts with his affable tone in other meetings. David Sklar, an American who works at the External Relations Department, told RRT Leader that these comments reflect KRG thinking and that there is a certain amount of frustration with perceived weakening of U.S.-KRG ties. In particular, the Kurds are frustrated at what they see as U.S. closeness to Arab leaders in Baghdad whose reliability as U.S. allies stands in stark contrast (in Kurdish eyes) with the Kurds. All recent high-level visitors have received a much more diplomatic version of Falah's points (minus the accusation about the State Dept and complaints about assistance and the

RRT status). The KRG may have decided it would be useful to convey their frustration in a meeting with the RRT Leader rather than to bring this out bluntly with a high-level visitor. They may also see it as useful to stake out a position in the run-up to a period of negotiations with the GOI and KRG over disputed internal boundaries and the status of Kirkuk and to make a preemptive strike against what they anticipate will be U.S. pressure.

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